



AGENDA MEMO

CITY COUNCIL MEETING DATE: MARCH 7, 2007

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**ITEM DESCRIPTION: DIR-18616 - APPLICANT: CITY OF LAS VEGAS - OWNER:
JUNIOR LEAGUE**

**** CONDITIONS ****

The Planning Commission (7-0 vote) and staff recommend APPROVAL, subject to:

**** STAFF REPORT ****

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This request is to designate a parcel of land known as the “Morelli House,” as an Historic Property within the City of Las Vegas on 0.51 acres located at 861 Bridger Avenue, (APN 139-34-701-002), Ward 5 (Weekly). The Morelli House is currently listed on the Nevada state Register of Historic Places. The Junior League of Las Vegas owns the building and supports the nomination. The Historic Preservation Commission voted to approve the nomination for designation based on the property’s ability to meet the requirements for historic designation as listed in Title 19.06.090 I. Designation of Landmarks, Historic Properties and Historic Districts. Adoption of historical status will result in an “H” designation for this property, requiring Historic Preservation Commission review prior to issuance of building permits or discretionary permits such as Site Development Plan Reviews and Rezonings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

<i>Related Relevant City Actions by P&D, Fire, Bldg., etc.</i>	
4/1/92	City Council adopted the General Plan with Historic Preservation Plan component.
12/15/97	City Council adopted the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Ordinance, subchapter 19.06.090 of the City of Las Vegas Zoning Code, which governs designation of historic properties, the Historic Preservation Commission and its duties.
12/6/06	Historic Preservation Commission voted to approve historic designation of Morelli House to the City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register and proceed with public hearing.
02/08/07	The Planning Commission voted 7-0 to recommend APPROVAL (PC Agenda Item #33/cm).

APPLICATION REQUEST

Request to designate a parcel of land known as the “Morelli House,” as an Historic Property within the City of Las Vegas on 0.51 acres located at 861 Bridger Avenue, (APN 139-34-701-002), Ward 5 (Weekly).

ANALYSIS

The Morelli House, located at 861 Bridger Avenue, has been determined eligible for listing on the City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register as an Historic Property by the Historic Preservation Commission. The Morelli House is owned by the Junior League of Las Vegas, a non-profit service organization.

The property meets the requirements for Historic Property designation under the following criterion, as stated in the City of Las Vegas Title 19.06.090, section I.2. Designation of Landmarks, Historic Properties and Historic Districts:

2. An individual property, building, structure or archeological site may be designated as an Historic Property if it:
 - (a) Qualifies under **Subparagraph (a)** or Subparagraph (b) of Paragraph (1) above;
[**Subparagraph (a)** It meets the criteria for listing on the State or National Register of Historic Places.]
 - (b) Is less than fifty years old, but is an integral and critical part of an Historic District or demonstrates exceptional importance by meeting or exceeding the other criteria described in Subparagraph (a) or Subparagraph (b) of Paragraph 1 above.

The City of Las Vegas supports the preservation of historic resources with the following documents:

The City of Las Vegas *Priorities*:

- Revitalize and invigorate our mature areas and the urban core
- Support and encourage sustainability, livability, and pride in our neighborhoods

The City of Las Vegas Master Plan 2020, adopted by Planning Commission on June 15, 2000 and City Council on September 6, 2000:

Reurbanization

OBJECTIVE 1.4: To retain, where viable, historical structures which represent the architectural, cultural and social legacy of the City of Las Vegas.

Neighborhood Revitalization Area

GOAL 2: Mature neighborhoods will be sustained and improved through appropriate and selective high quality redevelopment and preservation.

Cultural Enhancement

OBJECTIVE 5.2: To promote cultural awareness and pride within the city.

The City of Las Vegas *Historic Preservation Plan*:

Goal: Promote the educational, cultural, economic, and general welfare of the public through the preservation, maintenance and protection of structures, sites and districts of significant historic, architectural, and archaeological interest within Las Vegas.

Objective A: Promote the preservation and maintenance of structures, sites and districts of historic interest within Las Vegas.

Historic Significance of the Morelli House (taken from Nevada state nomination report):

Architecture

The Morelli House was constructed in 1959 the mid-century Modern style. This flat-roofed subtype of the Contemporary style is a derivative of the earlier International style, and sometimes referred to as American International. At the time, the Morelli House was revolutionary for Las Vegas when most custom homes were merely expanded ranch-style forms. The Morelli house brought vaulted ceilings to the desert and the concept of integrating the building with the site, particularly effective in a golf course development. In a May 2, 2001 telephone conversation, UNLV professor of architecture, Janet White, interpreted the site plan of the Morelli house and its relationship to its setting. The window-wall façade, facing the golf course, was the front of the home--its monumental façade. The site was of the utmost importance to the structure, as were its proportions. The original plans show a different front arrangement, with a 6-foot-high block wall set in zig-zags, creating a dynamic approach. The pool was built behind the wall, sheltered from the street. A number of Morelli's neighbors built swimming pools on the golf course side of their homes, providing no privacy for swimmers, and interfering with the buildings' interplay with the golf course. Mr. Morelli understood the relationship between building and grounds, and sought to emphasize it. Mr. Morelli loved clean lines and eschewed ornamental plantings on his property. The only plantings were in the niches of the wall along the street.

The architecture of the Morelli House was directly influenced by the works of R. M. Schindler, who built modernist houses in southern California, and Philip Johnson, whose acclaimed Glass House is located in New Canaan, Connecticut, Mrs. Morelli's hometown.

That Schindler would serve to be the inspiration for the Morelli house is appropriate, since Schindler developed his distinctive architectural stylings in the 1920s in the warm, sunny climate of southern California, an area that has strongly influenced Las Vegas architecture over the years. Schindler, even his early houses, sported flat roofs with wide overhangs, and window walls to bring the outdoors in and meld the building with the site.

Schindler studied architecture and engineering in his native Austria. Inspired by Adolf Loos, Schindler came to the United States in 1914. Disappointed at first with America, Schindler was planning to return to Austria when he landed a position at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin studio. In 1920, Wright sent Schindler to Los Angeles to oversee the construction of the Barnsdall House, popularly known as the Hollyhock House. Upon completion of the Hollyhock House, Schindler stayed in California and opened his own practice. By 1928, Schindler had developed a particular vision of architecture that is clearly reflected in Mr. Morelli's plans for his own home.

Philip Johnson was an early proponent of the International Style and worked with the early modernist masters from Europe, the likes of Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and J.J.P. Oud, and those from America, including Schindler, and his colleague and fellow Austrian, Richard Neutra.

Despite the fact that the house has been moved from its original location, the Morelli House retains a high degree of integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and even association. It is an excellent early example of Modern architecture in Las Vegas, and is important to the architectural history of the area.

History

The Morelli House was built in 1959 in prestigious Desert Inn Estates overlooking the second fairway at the world-class Desert Inn Golf Course. The Desert Inn was the fifth property to be built along the Las Vegas Strip, and its premier resort for more than a decade. Although it was the first country club community built in Las Vegas, it was not originally set up as a housing development. The first homes on the resort grounds were for the use of the owner/developer, Wilbur Clark, his executives, and certain high rollers, including Howard Hughes. Desert Inn Estates was developed in 1952, two years after the opening of the Desert Inn casino/resort. The 165 parcels encircled the golf course to the east of the hotel, with open desert land beyond. A few years later 15 interior parcels were opened for development under the name of Desert Inn Estates 2. The average parcel size was 1.25 acre, but interspersed were a few double lots. Desert Inn Estates was the first Las Vegas development which employed modern design. A number of notable performers built homes in the Estates including Keely Smith, and Betty Grable and her husband, bandleader Harry James. Bob Miller, Nevada's governor from 1989 to 1999, grew up in Desert Inn Estates.

The Morelli House was built by and for Antonio Morelli, the orchestra conductor and music director for the Sands Hotel. Mr. Morelli chose the modernistic design for his house in Desert Inn Estates and approached the Sands' carpenter foreman, Richard Small, with his ideas. Together, over the course of two years, the two men designed and built the house at 52 Country Club Drive, and Las Vegas architect, Hugh E. Taylor was engaged to draw the plans. Richard Small was the master carpenter at the Sands, but he also built several other custom homes in town. Mr. Small had first come from his home state of Montana to Nevada during the depression to work in the silver mines at Silver Peak. During World War II he worked as the carpenter foreman at the Nevada Test Site where he built structures used in the atomic test shots.

Antonio Morelli was a significant character in the history of Las Vegas. Richard Small's son Michael reports that Maestro Morelli was brought to town to upgrade the level of local culture. A classically-trained musician, he brought classical music to the area, organizing the first pops concerts in the early 1960s. To promote music education, Mr. Morelli initiated the Antonio Morelli Friends of Music scholarship to assist University of Nevada, Las Vegas music students, with a \$5,000 gift in 1969. Also, in his role as music director for the Sands, he came into contact with America's top performers of the day. The Sands ruled the Strip at that time. The famous Rat Pack performed there, and it has been reported that singers like Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., and others worked through scores in Morelli's music room.

Mr. Kay Glenn purchased the home from Antonio Morelli's widow in 1978. Kay Glenn had been Howard Hughes' press secretary from 1951 until the millionaire's death in 1976. Mr. Glenn made only two changes to the house in the 22 years he owned it, and that was to change paint color in two places. In April 2000, Steve Wynn purchased the Desert Inn with plans to replace it with a 59-story mega-resort. These plans included the demolition of the historic Desert Inn Hotel, the golf course, and the surrounding homes in Desert Inn Estates.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS NOTIFIED

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NOTICES MAILED

NEWSPAPER ONLY

APPROVALS

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PROTESTS

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